

## **Tips for International Students Searching for Jobs in the United States**

### **What sectors/employers hire international students on OPT, and are likely to sponsor their H1B visas? Does the Career and Practicum Office have a list of employers who have sponsored in the past?**

Generally speaking, our graduates have been sponsored by academic medical centers and hospitals, consulting firms, and other private sector organizations. Often times, non-profits do not sponsor international students unless they are "research-based". Getting sponsored in the U.S. is all about "Supply and Demand". The most common hard-to-fill jobs are in Biostatistics, Statistical Programming, Health Economics Outcomes Research and Health IT (especially due to healthcare reform). In terms of a list of employers who have sponsored in the past, unfortunately, each year it varies. An employer could sponsor in one year, but not sponsor in the next. Instead, we recommend targeting these sectors/employers as a strategy, as these settings are where our graduates have been sponsored in the past.

### **What skills should I gain through my courses and practicum to make me competitive to employers?**

Gain as many technical skills as possible including data visualization in order to communicate results in an easy-to-understand format. Examples include Advanced SAS, Advanced Excel, SQL and Access. Exposure to working on Electronic Health Record Databases and claims data is also very. Build your résumé with projects that highlight these skills. Additionally, strong communications, interpersonal and teamwork skills are critical for employers. If you are targeting the private sector and consulting firms, business acumen is also essential.

### **I know that the STEM OPT extension allows some graduates to stay on their Optional Practical Training (OPT) for 29 months vs. 12 months. What BUSPH Programs fall under STEM?**

- Environmental Hazard Assessment and Epidemiology & Biostatistics

### **Since I have a predetermined amount of time in the United States for my OPT (either 12 months or 29 months), do you recommend that I speak with staffing firms?**

Yes, that can be a good strategy for international students as many of these same sectors listed above hire staffing firms to recruit for shorter term contract positions. For international graduates who plan on returning to their home countries after their OPT, this is a great way to gain experience. Additionally, it's very possible that these contract positions could lead into a permanent job. We recommend that you target staffing firms who may look for candidates with your background. Examples include Propel Careers, Kelly Scientific, Randstad and Aerotek. See more extensive list of firms on our website.

### **Job applications ask if I am eligible to work in the United States. Since I'll be on my OPT, does that mean I am eligible and should answer yes?**

No. With OPT, unfortunately, you are not considered eligible because it is not for the long term. The employer has to sign your OPT application which is required by U.S. government (via ISSO).

### **What start date should I put down for my OPT application, and when should I start applying to jobs?**

We recommend that international students speak with ISSO to determine a potential start date to begin a position using OPT. Depending on what is happening in the U.S. Government with regard to processing applications as well as what is happening in the job market, advice can vary. Once a start date is determined, begin applying approximately 2 months prior to that date. For sectors who tend to have early hiring cycles (*consulting recruitment is often in the fall*) or longer hiring cycles such as academia, adjust your timeline. No matter when you "hit submit" on an application, it's never too early to begin networking! It can often result in job leads and can help you determine your job search strategy in terms of when to begin applying.

### **I constantly hear that networking is really important, especially for international students and graduates. How should I go about doing this?**

In addition to networking with BUSPH community members (alums, fellow students) and attending professional events, network with people from your home country who have successfully been sponsored. Approach people at non-work settings, such as temples and community gatherings, to enlist their

advice. They may be able to refer you to jobs at their companies and/or provide people for you to contact.

### **Are there other strategies you can recommend if I want to stay and work in the United States?**

Yes, we recommend a few different strategies:

- Target organizations in states where there are less highly qualified candidates. For example, look at states where there are less universities producing MPH candidates. Additionally, look beyond major cities and instead target secondary cities as well as rural areas.
- Focus on hard-to-fill jobs such as those that are analytics oriented. It's all about supply and demand.
- Target large international companies and consulting firms. They often are more used to sponsoring international graduates. Or, they may have opportunities initially for you to work in your home country but then allow you to travel back here in the future to work in one of their U.S. offices.
- Have a plan B to explore the Canadian job market and apply for [Canada's Express Entry Permanent Residence/Skilled Worker](#) Immigration program.
- Have a plan C to return home. Use Handshake to find employers with offices in your home country, check out our Career Library for tips, leverage BU's extensive global alumni network and sign up for alerts from [Indeed Worldwide](#).

### **I have specific questions about the Practicum which I know is considered Curricular Practical Training (CPT). For example, can I conduct more than one, or a longer Practicum? Who should I speak with?**

International students may only complete what is required of the MPH program which is 240 hours with one organization. International students must go through the Practicum Portal approval process (see website) — and in ADDITION — must have their practicum authorized by ISSO to be used as Curricular Practical Training (CPT). **International students can NOT begin their practicum, including any kind of Orientation at the practicum site, without ISSO authorization.** Please contact the ISSO to apply for CPT.

- CPT cannot be processed for authorization until a student is registered for PH976 (which is only done after the Practicum Portal Proposal is approved)
- CPT form should be signed by a Practicum Manager who is listed as Practicum Instructor or Advisor

Be sure to leave 1-2 weeks (before your proposed practicum start date) to go through this additional authorization step. **Failure to gain CPT authorization before beginning your practicum could result in a violation of your immigration status. In this case, you will be asked to leave the United States to re-apply for your Visa and will lose Optional Practical Training (OPT) privileges.**

### **I received a job offer and will be on OPT for 12 months. Can I ask the employer to sponsor my H1B visa?**

Yes, but WHEN you ask depends on the situation. When you receive an offer, as part of your negotiation, you can ask if the employer would be willing to sponsor your H1B visa assuming your work is satisfactory and the organization still has a business need. If you receive an offer and the employer has already told you they can NOT sponsor the H1B visa, sometimes you can revisit this after you're settled in the organization and have showcased your value. An employer may be more apt to sponsor you after they have gotten to know you and have seen your work.

### **Should I offer an employer to pay for my legal fees if they agree to sponsor me for an H1B visa?**

Employers arrange and pay for all legal services associated with your H1B visa application. Some employers may offer you a slightly lesser salary since they are paying for these fees. It is highly unusual for a candidate to arrange and pay for their own legal services.

### **I have been contacted by a recruiter (headhunter) and they said they could help me find a job. But, I would have to pay them a fee for their services. Is this common? Should I pay the fee?**

Unfortunately there are some "fly by night" recruiters who ask candidates to pay a fee for their services. We recommend that you do not work with these recruiters or pay a fee. Reputable recruiting and staffing firms are only paid by the employer for their services. They are not paid by the job candidates.

